

More War, “Kill Courts” at Home. The Real Meaning of Obama’s National Security Speeches

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This past Thursday and Friday, President Obama delivered two speeches designed to outline his new thinking on national security and counter-terrorism. While much was made in the media of the president’s statements at the National Defense University and the US Naval Academy suggesting that the most active phase of US military action overseas was coming to an end, this “new” approach is but the same old policy wrapped in new packaging. In these addresses, the president panders to the progressives, while continually expanding and solidifying the “enabling act” principle.

The president will continue and even expand drone attacks overseas because they are “less deadly” than ground invasions. He promises to be more careful in the future.

He is entertaining the introduction of “kill courts” which will meet in secret to decide who is to be executed without trial or charge. He promises these will have sufficient oversight.

He will seek a new and updated Authorization for the Use of Military Force to expand his legal authority to wage war wherever and whenever he wants. He promises it will one day be repealed.

He will continue to indefinitely detain at Guantanamo individuals who have been neither charged nor convicted of any crime, and who cannot even be tried because they were tortured and thus the evidence is tainted. He promises to “commit to a process of closing GTMO.”

The speech speaks of more war and more killing and more interventionism all masked in the language of withdrawal.

The president warns of the threats of the new al-Qaeda affiliates that have sprung up in places like Iraq without explaining that it was the US invasion of Iraq that opened the door to their entry in the first place. There was no al-Qaeda in Iraq before the US overthrow of Saddam Hussein, just as there was little extremism in Libya before the US attack on that country in 2011.

The president claims that “unrest in the Arab world has also allowed extremists to gain a foothold in countries like Libya and Syria.” However, it was the US-led attack on Libya that resulted in extremists gaining power there, with many fighters afterward spreading unrest and destruction by joining the wars against the Syrian and Malian regimes. The extremists brought to de facto power in places like Benghazi were responsible for the murder of the US ambassador, yet the president says nothing about that unintended consequence of his

interventionist policies.

He calls for even more interventionism in the future, but he promises that it will be a different kind of interventionism. He wants the US to shape democratic transitions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya while actively supporting those seeking to overthrow the government in Syria.

He wants to take nation-building to a whole new level, urging that the US “help countries modernize economies, upgrade education, and encourage entrepreneurship.” He promises to battle extremism overseas by “training security forces in Libya, maintaining peace agreements between Israel and its neighbors, feeding the hungry in Yemen, building schools in Pakistan, and creating reservoirs of goodwill that marginalize extremists.”

What the president does not seem to understand is that we do not have the money to build schools, upgrade education, modernize economies, and encourage entrepreneurship overseas at a time when our national debt is \$16 trillion. And besides, isn't it a deeply flawed idea that the US government can achieve all of these remarkable results overseas when we know what a disaster these big government undertakings have produced at home? What we reject at home as Soviet-style central planning is fully embraced as effective foreign policy overseas. Should it really be the US government's role to “modernize economies” or “encourage entrepreneurs” anywhere? Those are activities best left to the private sector, whether here at home or in far off lands.

President Obama's speech is not at all what it seems. It is a call for more empire and more power to the executive branch. The president promises that “this war, like all wars, must end.” Unfortunately the war on the American taxpayer never seems to end. But end it will, as we are running out of money.

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